

based on this new intelligence and fact-based assessment to avoid the disastrous mistakes of Iraq. Yesterday's NIE does not invalidate the effectiveness of previous efforts to use an international consensus of pressure on Iran. We must be careful not to run from one end of the pendulum all the way to the other.

As President Bush noted again this morning, the United States must continue to work with our friends and our allies to sustain an international consensus on Iran. I believe the President is correct: alliances, common purpose, common interests, focus, discipline.

Iran's objectionable words and actions are real, and they must continue to be addressed. That means a very clear-eyed and realistic sense of Iran and its motives. As I said in my November 8 CSIS speech regarding U.S.-Iran policy, the United States must employ a comprehensive strategy regarding Iran: Iraq, the Israeli-Palestinian issue, the Middle East, a regional comprehensive strategy.

Yesterday's NIE reinforces the need for directed, unconditional, and comprehensive engagement with Iran. The United States and the international community must use all—all—elements of our foreign policy arsenal in offering direct, unconditional, and comprehensive talks with Iran. The United States should be clear that all issues, our issues and Iran's issues, are on the table, including offering Iran a credible way back from the fringes of the international community, security guarantees, and other incentives.

We urgently need to adopt a comprehensive strategy on Iran that is focused on direct engagement and diplomacy backed, as diplomacy must always be backed, by the leverage of international pressure, isolation, containment, and military options.

The United States must employ wise statecraft to redirect deepening tensions with Iran toward a higher ground of resolution. That is what Annapolis was about last week. America is the great power here. Iran is not the great power. We must be the more mature country in testing the proposition that the United States and Iran can overcome decades of mutual mistrust, suspicion, and hostility.

That is diplomacy. Diplomacy is not talking to your friends; diplomacy is not giving another country bonus points for us talking to them. There is a reason for diplomacy. We should not squander this opportunity as we did in the spring of 2003 when we had an opportunity for an opening to explore talks with Iran.

This initiative, by the way, in 2003, came from Iran. We are witnessing a confluence of events in the Middle East and around the world that presents the United States with new opportunities. There are hopeful and positive recent developments: Progress on North Korea's nuclear weapons program; the recent regional meeting in Istanbul on Iraq; the momentum generated by last

week's Annapolis Middle East meeting where all Arab countries, including Syria, sat at the same table with Israel; and yesterday's NIE assessment.

Now is the time for America to act and to lead, and to lead boldly, with confidence, with our allies, focusing on a common purpose.

One dimensional optics, policies, and blunt black-or-white rhetoric, such as "you are either with us or you are against us" will not work, haven't worked, and will fall short of what is expected from American leadership in the eyes of the world.

The world faces challenges and opportunities today that carry with it implications well beyond this moment in time. American leadership is once again being called on at yet another transformational time in history to help set a new course, a new framework for a rudderless world drifting in a sea of combustible dangers.

In engaging Iran, the Middle East, and the world, we must be wide in our scope, clear in our purpose, measured in our words, and strong in our actions. Yesterday's NIE should not be overstated, but it also must not be undervalued in shaping future policy with Iran and in the Middle East.

Make no mistake, the NIE sets in motion a series of ripple effects that will have serious consequences. This should be welcome news for the United States and the world.

Mr. President, I thank you, yield the floor, and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. WHITEHOUSE). The clerk will call the roll of the Senate.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### RESPONSIBILITY TO GOVERN

Mr. BYRD. Mr. President, as Congress reconvenes this week after our observance of the Thanksgiving holiday, we find a brisk wind blowing through the streets of the Nation's Capital. As cold temperatures begin to grip the country, Americans are turning up the heat in their homes, but the elected leaders of our country should seize the opportunity to turn down the heat in Washington.

Three days ago, in his weekly radio address, the President placed the blame at the feet of Congress for the delays in enacting 11 of the 12 annual appropriations bills. But finger pointing does nothing—nothing, zilch—to solve the impasse, which began with White House threats to veto 10 of those funding bills. With 3 short weeks left in this session of Congress, it is time to close down the political posturing and recognize we have a responsibility to govern.

As the chairman of the Senate Appropriations Committee, it is clear to

me that Congress is working with great diligence to find a way around our budget conundrum. Working hand in hand with Members of the minority, we are crafting an appropriations package that I expect will garner bipartisan support. This package contemplates a reduction of \$10.6 billion from the spending levels approved by Congress in this year's budget resolution. And \$10.6 billion is a lot of money. In addition, various controversial matters, some of which have been the subject of veto threats, are eliminated.

Both Democrats and Republicans in Congress are attempting, in good faith, to find a way around the veto threat demagoguery that has been emanating from 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue for months. Now the White House needs to put aside politics and recognize it is time to govern in the responsible manner that is expected by the American people.

I urge the President—and he is my President, too, and I say it respectfully—to stop the stale veto threats that have been the albatross around the neck of responsible budgeting for months. The fact is the needs of this Nation have changed since the budget was submitted way back in February. That should come as no great surprise.

The Senate, on a bipartisan basis, has recognized these needs, and events have made them crystal clear.

The crumbling state of our infrastructure was punctuated by a deadly—and I mean deadly—bridge collapse in Minnesota. The Senate passed a bill containing funds for the bridge replacement and for repairing bridges across the Nation by a vote of 88 to 7. That was the responsible thing to do.

Soaring oil prices mean a cruel squeeze on low-income heating assistance. The Senate approved by a vote of 75 to 19 a bill providing increased heating assistance. That was the responsible thing to do.

Investigations into the treatment of soldiers returning from Iraq and Afghanistan have underlined greater demands on the VA health care system. Legislation to increase funding for our veterans passed the Senate by a vote of 92 to 1. That was the moral thing to do.

More money is needed to improve the security of our borders. An amendment to provide such funding passed the Senate 89 to 1. That was the smart thing to do.

In July, the administration released its latest National intelligence report that concluded al-Qaida has regrouped in Pakistan with the intention of attacking the United States again. The Senate passed a Homeland Security bill to increase funding for first responders by a vote of 89 to 4.

Rising crime rates in this country highlight the wisdom of additional funding for law enforcement. The Senate passed legislation providing such funding for cops on the street by a vote of 75 to 19.

The rising cost of food means that there must be more funding for the

Women, Infants and Children Program or 500,000 people will lose important nutritional support.

Yet despite all of these developments since the President submitted an inadequate spending proposal in February, the White House continues to demand an arbitrary and irresponsible ceiling on spending. The White House continues to stubbornly oppose bipartisan initiatives to invest money to solve the real problems that face the Nation.

Soon, the first session of this 110th Congress will draw to a close, but there is still time to craft an appropriations proposal that makes a sincere attempt to meet the President in the middle of the road. I thank Senator THAD COCHRAN and his ranking members for their efforts as we move forward in completing the fiscal year 2008 appropriations process.

So the choice is clear—as clear as the noonday Sun in a cloudless sky. The President and the Congress must recognize that the people of this country expect their leaders—that is us, the people downtown at the other end of the avenue and those across the Capitol—to actually govern and address the real problems facing the country.

Democrats and Republicans in Congress are willing to work to resolve differences and complete a fiscally responsible package of appropriations bills. But to do the people's business, the Congress must be joined by a White House willing, at last, to jettison its political posturing, stop its political posturing. The tyranny of the veto threat has already dangerously delayed the Nation's priorities for far too long.

I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. REID. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

#### TEMPORARY TAX RELIEF ACT OF 2007—MOTION TO PROCEED

Mr. REID. Mr. President, the American people are about to see what the Democrats have tried to do all year and what we have been prevented from doing all year because of the obstructionism of the Republicans.

President Bush is out giving speeches that we have to do AMT. We have to take care of that. He is giving speeches all over the country. He gives press conferences talking about why we aren't doing AMT. Everybody watch. Here is why we aren't doing AMT. They do not want us to do it. They want, at the end of the year, to say: Look, the Democrats are not doing AMT. Everyone should understand we are not doing it because the Republicans, all 49 of them, backed by President Bush, don't want us to do it.

Mr. President, we have offered them a proposal. We will have a vote with a

60-vote margin on them all—on the bill the House has passed. The bill has passed. The bill passed by the House fully funds AMT. They won't let us vote on that. So I say: OK, let's vote on Senator LOTT's proposal, which just eliminates AMT. And then I say: Let's work on the proposal we have from the Finance Committee that has come from Senator BAUCUS and Senator GRASSLEY which has some extenders in it that we need to complete this year and then doesn't pay for the AMT. The Republicans don't want the AMT paid for. How much more fair could we be? We are giving them a vote on virtually everything dealing with AMT. But, no, they won't do that. It is the way it has been going all year long. We can't do the farm bill. We can't do anything around here, Mr. President. That is why we have had to file cloture 56 times. They have objected even to bills they agree with just to eat up time around here.

So I am not going to ask consent to move, as we have previously. I gave the Republican leader a proposal earlier today, as I have in the past, to do just as I have outlined, covering every possible facet of AMT—60 votes on all of them. But, no, no votes on any of them. So now I am left with no alternative but to file cloture on the only measure dealing with AMT that is now before this body.

For the life of me, I don't understand what they are trying to accomplish. What I have heard recently, in the last hour or so, is that now what they want to do is—we have certain tax provisions that are expiring in 2011—they want to vote on those. Now, that is 3 or 4 years away, and we have something that is expiring in a matter of weeks. How do those things tie together? They do not.

This is an effort to thwart the progress of our slim majority, 51 to 49. The Republicans want to go around saying the Democrats aren't doing the work of this country. Well, we have a long list of accomplishments we are very proud of, but also the American people understand that we are agents of change and the Republicans are agents of the status quo. That is what this is all about. They want things to stay the way they have been, and we want to change things, and not only in Iraq. We don't have another long-standing debate on that. We want to change the course in Iraq, and we want to change course in the way this country has been headed for the last 7 years—into the economic doldrums. And here today, what we want to do is finish a part of what we believe is an obligation to this country, and that is to make sure that when the first of the year rolls around, 19 million Americans don't have a tax increase. Everyone within the sound of my voice should understand, if that comes to be, it can go to 16th and Pennsylvania Avenue because that is what President Bush—he is the man who is pulling the strings on the 49 puppets he has here in the

Senate. That is too bad for the country.

I move to proceed to H.R. 3996. There is a cloture motion at the desk. I ask the clerk to report it.

#### CLOTURE MOTION

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion having been filed under rule XXII, the clerk will report the motion to invoke cloture.

The assistant legislative clerk read as follows:

#### CLOTURE MOTION

We, the undersigned Senators, in accordance with the provisions of rule XXII of the Standing Rules of the Senate, do hereby move to bring to a close debate on the motion to proceed to Calendar No. 487, H.R. 3996, the AMT tax bill.

Harry Reid, Dick Durbin, Patty Murray, Max Baucus, Jay Rockefeller, Patrick Leahy, Daniel K. Inouye, Herb Kohl, Benjamin L. Cardin, Jeff Bingaman, Ted Kennedy, Carl Levin, B.A. Mikulski, Barbara Boxer, Debbie Stabenow, Maria Cantwell, Bill Nelson.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, reserving the right to object, and I will be.

Has the Senator not asked consent to go to the House-passed bill?

Mr. REID. No, I said I wouldn't do that. I am sorry if there was some confusion. I said I was not going to do that. I had been told by the staff that there would be an objection, so I indicated I was not going to do that. I apologize to my friend.

Mr. McCONNELL. May I ask the Parliamentarian, what is the state of play? On what was cloture just filed?

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The motion to proceed to H.R. 3996 was made, and the motion to invoke cloture was filed on that.

The Republican leader is recognized.

Mr. McCONNELL. Mr. President, I think we all can agree we should fix the AMT. We should have done it much earlier this year. Shortly, I am going to present a unanimous consent agreement based on a very simple proposition: Our time is running short; therefore, we should start the debate with the areas of broadest agreement and work from there.

So what can we all agree upon? We agree it is past time for Congress to act to ensure that 23 million American families do not face a major tax increase this year. While my side of the aisle believes we should permanently repeal the AMT, we are also prepared to ensure that middle-income Americans get tax relief this year.

We agree tax extenders are important to small business, to parents paying college tuition for their children, to teachers who buy classroom supplies with their own money. These issues are not controversial, and I believe a majority of the Senate supports them.

However, there is an area of strong disagreement. We disagree with the proposition that taxes must be permanently raised in order to extend current tax policy. By patching the AMT and extending other expiring provisions, we are simply maintaining the